



## A Day's Work at the Beach

After many years of making woodblock print reproductions, last year I began to produce my own original prints. This has added a whole new step to my work, as in addition to doing all the carving and printing, I now have to create designs too, and this is not easy for me. My current project is a series of landscape prints based on three locations - river, woodland, and seacoast - and so it is that it is necessary for me to spend quite a bit of time lying on a beach 'thinking' about images. (It's a tough job, but somebody has to do it!)

A short time ago, I was visiting my favourite beach, on a quite isolated cove that I have discovered down on the Miura Peninsula. The purpose of making this particular trip was to see what the cove looked like at the time of extreme low tide, so I had checked the tide table carefully before going, and had selected a time when the tide would be at one of the lowest ebbs of the year.

I was indeed able to enjoy the sight of a very wide beach, with the water being quite far out. This gave the place quite a different feeling than I had experienced on previous visits there, and I was able to get some interesting ideas for my work. It was a fine day in early summer, and after I had got the photos and made the notes I had come for, I had no hesitation in stripping to my shorts and taking a swim.

With the water so low, I was able to swim farther out than I had done before, in an area where there was quite a bit of underwater seaweed growing. I swam a bit, floated a bit, and just generally lazed around in the water. At one point though, I was surprised to find that there was somebody else out there with me. It was an elderly lady, fully dressed in baggy clothing, with a sun bonnet tied over her head. She was half swimming, half floating, and had a wooden bucket in her hand. It seemed that this had a glass bottom, because she was peering down into the water through it.

She was surprised to see me, and didn't seem particularly happy to be meeting somebody. I tried to be polite and asked what she was looking for, but didn't get a very clear answer. "Nothing here at all. Nothing around here, you know ... Just wasting my time here it seems ..."

She then moved past me, paddling along, and as she passed I could see that she was pulling some kind of plastic float along behind her. I had no idea what this was all about, but anyway, it was none of my business, so I just continued with my swimming, and shortly after, returned to my mat on the beach to relax and have a snack.

Some time later, I noticed her head bobbing out there in the water, as she paddled back along the way she had originally come. I was quite curious now though as to just what she was doing, so watched her progress. As she came to the end of the cove 50 meters or so away from me, I quietly took my binoculars from my bag to watch. What I saw astonished me. As she stepped out of the water up onto the beach she pulled something behind her; something so heavy that she could

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barely drag it along the sand. It was a large bag that must have been suspended in the water beneath the plastic float.

She now brought out from a hiding place in the bushes one of those old-fashioned baskets that we sometimes see elderly farm ladies carrying on their back. She proceeded to fill this up with the mountain of treasure that she had pulled from the sea. At this distance I couldn't tell what this was, but I assume it was some kind of small shellfish that can be harvested at low tide. Today's tide was very low, and she had made a stunning haul.

Once she had finished - and it took a long time - she slipped her arms through the loops, struggled to her feet, and began to walk along the beach. Her route homeward bound brought her along right in front of where I sat, and as she drew near, staggering under her burden and using a walking stick for support, I debated what I might say to her.

In the end, I said nothing, just smiled as she passed by. She also said nothing. But - as you may imagine - she also smiled ... and smiled ... and smiled!